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SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: LITHUANIAN DAILY ATTACKS OPEN SOCIETY FUND, CIVIL SOCIETY

REF(s):

- (A) FBIS EUP20051117070001 Vilnius ELTA
- (B) FBIS EUP20051111341002 Riga Latvijas Avize
- (C) FBIS EUP20051117070003 Vilnius Respublika
- (D) VILNIUS 1029

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - NOT FOR INTERNET OR OTHER PUBLICATION

SUMMARY

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1. (SBU) A weeklong, continuing series of articles in Lithuania's second leading daily "Respublika" has attacked several Western-oriented NGO leaders whose organizations have received funding from George Soros's Open Society Fund (OSF). The attacks impugn the intentions of the NGOs and tar western-oriented politicians, including President Valdas Adamkus, as somehow influenced by foreign funding to act against Lithuanian national interests. We understand that similar articles have appeared in the Ukraine and other parts of the former Soviet Union. Civil society leaders targeted by Respublika claim the series is a classical KGB-style smear campaign meant to instigate trouble and make Lithuanians look foolish. Respublika Group's managing editor Vitas Tomkus also advances his domestic political agenda through the articles, as most of those attacked are supporters of the parliamentary opposition or Adamkus. The Embassy has and will continue to buttress NGOs, which play an important role in mobilizing public participation in Lithuania's still-young democracy. End Summary.

A BIG LIE REPEATED

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2. (SBU) Respublika group papers and their recently purchase wire service ELTA began the campaign on November 10. Their continuing daily front-page stories seek to discredit the philanthropic activities of George Soros's fund in Lithuania (Refs A-C). The articles state that Soros wishes to undermine political stability here by funding civil society organizations and think tanks. The articles link OSF Lithuania with the Lithuanian President, think tank directors, Transparency International, and academic leaders in an apparent effort to discredit them. The November 10 article accuses Soros of undermining the impeached former President of Lithuania, Rolandas Paksas, and of funding the Orange and Rose revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia. Later articles indicate that Russian intelligence services know Soros works for the CIA and claim that the USG may support these efforts to undermine "stability" in the region. (We understand that similar anti-Soros articles have appeared recently in the Ukraine and other parts of the former Soviet Union.)

3. (SBU) The Respublika media group published the articles at a time when Soros funding of OSF-Lithuania (a locally registered and administered non-governmental institution) has largely ended, prompting questions about the timing. The first article interviewed Latvia's former PM (and current MP) Emsis, who notes the criticism Soros faced in Latvia. (Lithuanian media and politicians have rarely criticized Soros activities in Lithuania.) OSF-Lithuania is associated with people welland favorably known to the Embassy: Darius Kuolys (Director, Civil Society Institute), Rytis Juozapavicius (Director of Transparency International Lithuania), Virgis Valentinavicius (OSF Lithuania board chairman, and former ELTA head), Tomkus rival Rimvydas Valatka (Lietuvos Rytas Deputy Senior Editor), Romas Sakadolskis (Voice of America associate), Egidijus Aleksandravicius (Professor of History), and Leonidas Donskis (Professor of Philosophy).

4. (SBU) Respublika also noted the ties of President Adamkus's candidate for Prosecutor General Algimantas Valantinas to OSF-Lithuania. Parliament confirmed Valantinas on November 17 by a large margin. Only the Liberal Democrats fraction failed to support him.

5. (SBU) Respublika achieved international infamy for publishing a series of anti-Semitic and homophobic articles in March 2004, just before Lithuania entered NATO and the European Union. Vytas Tomkus runs Respublika as owner and managing editor and is largely responsible for the newspaper's extreme views. Respublika was founded in 1988. Today, the paper controls a media empire that enjoys a presence in many of the country's biggest markets. These publications share content and hew to the same ideological line. Respublika Publications Group dailies include:

- "Respublika" - Circ. 38,000. One of the first dailies in Lithuania published since 1988.  
 - "Respublika" - Circ. 20,000. Russian edition, published daily.  
 - "Vakaro Zinios" [Evening News]- scandal sheet and largest circulation tabloid (PAS - in the group or in the country?)- about 200,000 copies throughout Lithuania.  
 - "Vakaru Ekspresas" - Circ. 20,000. Largest daily in Western Lithuania.  
 - "Siaulio Krastas" - Circ. 20,000. Siauliai city and county daily.  
 - "Panevezio balsas" - Circ. 20,000. Panevezys city and region daily.  
 - "ELTA" wire service - one of two services that provide content for most town and regional papers.

#### MULTIPLE MOTIVES

16. (SBU) Diana Vilyte, OSF-Lithuania Director, told us that the articles are in retaliation for OSF Lithuania's criticism of Tomkus for publishing anti-Semitic articles. Vilyte and other OSF-Lithuania affiliates called for the prosecution of Tomkus in 2004. Respublika also printed a series of inflammatory front-page articles about the judge who presided over the anti-Semitic articles case, Audrius Cininas. Respublika sent journalists out to Judge Cininas's house and investigated his property holdings during the anti-Semitic trial. Vilyte and Cininas are considering separate slander cases against Respublika for making false statements, although there is little legal precedent in Lithuania for such action.

17. (SBU) Vilyte also noted that the Liberal Democratic Party of impeached President Paksas may also support the attack in some coordinated fashion. ELTA newswire reported November 16 that the Liberal Democratic parliamentary faction has asked the State Security Department to investigate Soros's organizations in Lithuania and find out if these structures are usurping Lithuania's public sector. When Vilyte (please protect) asked PM Brazauskas about Respublika's claim that the PM himself has asked the State Security Department (VSD) to investigate OSF-Lithuania, the PM reportedly refuted the claim but added that "everyone" is too afraid of Tomkus to challenge him publicly. Importantly, Respublika has also attempted to discredit President Adamkus by linking him to Soros. The

18. (SBU) Darius Kuolys, Director of the Civil Society Institute, remarked to us that the Social Democratic-Labor Coalition is also interested in diminishing the influence of think tanks and civil society institutions in Lithuania, and may also support the articles. Transparency International and the Civil Society Institute have been outspoken critics of the current government for corruption and promoting transparency in EU structural funds. He also believes that the articles seek to diminish the stature of U.S. and Western-supported institutions in Lithuania. He noted that November 17 edition of Respublika contained this bon mot: "Ultimatum: if Soros-politicians undermine popularly elected leaders, Respublika's leadership will export back to the U.S. Soros's package that currently occupies the Presidential Palace [read: President Adamkus]."

#### MECHANICS OF DISINFORMATION

19. (SBU) The primary thrust of the Respublika campaign has been to:

- malign Soros's intentions and activities by implying links to crime, terrorism, the CIA and instability (including the current riots in France);
- craft an exaggerated perception of the scope, strength, and subversive nature of a purported "campaign" to wield high-level influence and manipulate public opinion;
- accuse the Soros "network" and civil society in general of sowing discontent and instability to reduce public confidence in the current government; and
- associate Soros with anti-democratic practices, ironically by citing his role in pro-democratic revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia.

Once Soros is established as the enemy, pro-western civil society leaders who have received money from OSF and politicians who are linked to them are tarnished by association. A former Respublika journalist told us that, because Respublika group readers tend to be less trusting of the West, this campaign will likely bolster their distrust in civil society institutions and center-right political groups, including Adamkus and the Conservative party.

110. (SBU) The campaign may reflect Tomkus's personal political beliefs or his desire to strike back at those who criticize him. There are indications, however, that the campaign may be motivated by deeper political objectives. The writings closely coincide with Soros-related attacks in Latvia, Georgia, Ukraine and elsewhere. Egidius Aleksandravicius, a professor at Vytautas Magnus University who is a victim of this campaign, told us that

he believes the series to be motivated by foreign interests. Kuolys also believes that national and especially local media are influenced by foreign (read Russian) funds.

OUR RESPONSE: SOLIDIFYING TRANSFORMATION

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11. (SBU) The Embassy condemned Respublika's anti-Semitic and homophobic articles in 2004, and hosted two seminars on tolerance in 2005 for media, the public, and NGOs. The Ambassador and other Embassy officials have spoken at Transparency International-supported events. In January, the Ambassador will host an NGO roundtable to discuss tolerance, civil society, and character education as part of our ongoing, high-profile campaign to solidify the transformation of Lithuania's still-young democracy.

12. (SBU) We expect Tomkus to continue his attacks as long as they serve his purpose and he has copy. One apparent source of gratification for him is the attention he draws from his antics. If they were not so despicable, it might be useful to ignore his published statements, but some of them are too hateful to let slide. The Embassy will continue to support civil society and speak out against intolerance at every opportunity.

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